

GAMES

FAQ

Q Some of my older games don't work properly under Windows Vista. Have you got any tips?

A Inevitably with a new operating system, not every game is going to work. Still, there are a few things you can try. First, download the latest graphics drivers for your card (www.nvidia.com and www.ati.com). These can often fix a lot of the early teething problems. Next, look for a patch for your game on the manufacturer's website. If there is one, download and install it.

If your game still isn't working, right-click the program icon and select the Compatibility tab. Put a tick in the 'Run this program in compatibility mode for' box and choose Windows XP from the drop-down menu. Click OK and try the game again.

Finally, if the game loads and you get the menus, but the game stops working when you start playing, try turning off AA. If you want to have AA turned on, force the graphics card to do so by using Nvidia's Control Panel or ATI's Catalyst Control Center, depending on the make of your graphics card.

If you still get no joy, then your game probably isn't Vista compatible. However, it's worth trying future graphics card driver updates and looking out for a new game patch.

Seth Barton

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EA

Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars

★★★★★

£27 inc VAT

This follow-up to the granddaddy of real-time strategy is making an embarrassing attempt to look down with the kids, and also showing its many rivals how to have fun. Twelve years on from the original Command & Conquer, the formula has barely changed. It's still top-down battles won by base-building, simple resource collection and tank rushing. A few new, excitingly destructive, units and a move to a pretty 3D graphics engine doesn't constitute innovation. Amazingly, though, it's hard to call this a bad thing.

Yes, the formula is the same and instantly familiar to anyone who's ever played an RTS, but unlike its more po-faced prequels, the execution here is pure cartoon. Command & Conquer 3's war-torn sci-fi universe of preposterous plots and constant explosions is so exaggerated that calling it a strategy game is bending the truth. Really, this is an action game that involves a bit of building, and even that's incredibly simple. There's very little tactical thinking called for outside of constructing a massive army out of the best units you have available, then sending it off to the other side of the map, sitting back and watching the carnage unfold.

Because of this, it'll seem objectionable to lovers of deep, thoughtful, serious strategy. There's a lot of tongue in cheek here, and it's designed to entertain rather than truly challenge its players. As such, it's a refreshing alternative to games such as Company of Heroes and Supreme Commander. These are superior games for sure, and games that strive for original ideas, but they're also complicated and

SUMMARY

- ✓ Effortless fun
- ✓ Easy to master
- ✗ It's all been done before

STRATEGY GAME Requires Windows XP/Vista, 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, 8GB disk space
PART CODE B000MQ9G6G
SUPPLIER www.play.com
DETAILS <http://www.commandandconquer.com>



▲ Complete the GDI and Nod campaigns in Tiberium Wars, and you unlock one for the new race, the Scrin

entirely straightlaced. They're for people who feel they've mastered real-time strategy games, whereas Command & Conquer 3 is after the widest audience possible.

Even dedicated fans of the genre can take a lot from it, though. It's so over the top, not having fun is almost an impossibility. Its explosion-filled wars are peopled by giant robots, nuclear bombs, invisible tanks, enormous UFOs and crazed mutants. Though everything looks very different, it is all controlled and destroyed in the same way, so it's a game you can play with most of your mind turned off. The sheer scale of destruction means you'll feel pretty good for scoring a victory, though it's unlikely you've done anything clever.

Between the fights, the traditional Command & Conquer sci-fi soap opera cutscenes tell the

neverending story of the war between the GDI military and the Nod terrorists. Together with the shameless way the new playable faction, the Scrin, rips off any number of alien invasion movies, it's pretty clear this isn't a game to be taken seriously. As a dumb-but-happy celebration of things going boom, though, Command & Conquer 3 does a stand-up job.

Alec Meer

Top 5 games

1. Supreme Commander

£25 inc VAT ★★★★★



This RTS has the biggest battles ever seen on a PC. There's a vast range of units to command and the graphics are slick, but you'll need a powerful PC to run it smoothly.

SUPPLIER www.play.com **DETAILS** www.supremecommander.com **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2007



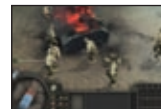
2. Company of Heroes

£15 inc VAT ★★★★★



This game looks fantastic, from the historically accurate units to the bombed-out French towns. But it's the innovative gameplay that makes it the best RTS around.

SUPPLIER www.play.com **DETAILS** www.thq.com **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



3. FIFA 2007

£25 inc VAT ★★★★★



The fully licensed teams and slick presentation have always been welcome, but FIFA 2007 is easier to play than its predecessor. Arguably, the best football game around.

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.com **DETAILS** <http://fifa07.ea.com> **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



4. FlatOut 2

£12 inc VAT ★★★★★



FlatOut 2 includes outrageous crashes that let you send your driver through the windscreen and into the road. It's also a brilliant racing game.

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.flatoutgame.com **FULL REVIEW** Oct 2006



5. The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

£13 inc VAT ★★★★★



The most stunning role-playing game we've ever played. It looks amazing, and there's so much to it you could play it for a month and still have loads left to do.

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.com **DETAILS** www.elderscrolls.com **FULL REVIEW** Jul 2006





▲ In Wild Earth Africa, you use a digital camera instead of a gun to shoot African wildlife

XPLOSIVE Wild Earth Africa

★★★★

£15 inc VAT

It's usually easy to pigeon-hole modern games, but there's something different about Wild Earth Africa: the shooting it asks you to do is done with a camera rather than a gun. You're a freelance nature photographer, tasked with exploring eight locations in the African Serengeti National Park, taking snaps of the wildlife to illustrate an informative article.

There's plenty here for kids to enjoy. The photos taken are automatically inserted into an informative wildlife awareness article, complete with hyperlinks to interesting nature-based websites. It's an engaging way to educate without forcing the issue. Not least because the game looks pretty, plays well and has some witty dialogue between the two narrators.

A level consists of a series of primary objectives to photograph and a set of secondary targets to embellish your article. With your objectives clearly shown, you're unleashed on to a mostly open area of the Serengeti. Should you start wandering aimlessly in this vast arena, a compass helpfully pops up to show the way to the next primary objective.

Despite the non-violent gameplay there is danger, though not the sort you'd expect. Get too close to a subject and the environmental impact bar starts to drop; if it drops too far, you're hauled off the mission. Take more photos and this bar rises again, as you raise environmental awareness with the article your shots are illustrating.

It's the lack of challenge that's our biggest issue: the compass and ease of keeping your environmental impact bar high mean levels are a stroll rather than a test of skill. Even with the interest of reading the end-of-level article and seeing your photos, there's not quite enough satisfaction at completing a level. Unless your child is nutty about nature, we suspect they will get bored quickly and move back to games where you shoot to kill.

Clive Webster

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good-looking and non-violent
- ✓ Educational and fun
- ✗ Unchallenging

PHOTOGRAPHY GAME Requires Windows 98 SE or later, 1GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 32MB DirectX 9.0 graphics, 1GB disk space

PRODUCT CODE B000MFQZ0W

SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.wildearthgame.com



▲ The puzzles in Ankh: Heart of Osiris aren't quite as devious as in certain other games

XIDER Ankh: Heart of Osiris

★★★★

£15 inc VAT

After great success in the 1990s followed by years of unpopularity, point-and-click adventure games seem to be enjoying something of a resurgence. Last year saw Dreamfall, a sequel to the successful but fairly old The Longest Journey, and the reappearance of old Lucasfilm characters Sam and Max in a series of short 3D games. This latest game follows on from the original Ankh, released almost a decade ago for Acorn computers.

The style of Ankh: Heart of Osiris is closer to the slapstick comedy of Sam and Max than the po-faced fantasy of Dreamfall. The game is set in Ancient Egypt and you play a young man called Assil. Having been thrown out by his girlfriend, Assil wakes in the gutter to find that a valuable artefact, the Ankh, has been stolen from him. This sets up two predictable plot objectives: reclaim the Ankh and the girlfriend.

Ankh has a traditional point-and-click interface. You move Assil by clicking at the point you'd like him to walk to, and you can interact with certain objects by clicking them. To progress, you need to collect objects from around the various locations, and use them together to solve logic puzzles. The puzzles in Ankh aren't quite as devious as some in other games, but they'll keep you thinking for some time.

The game looks good, with cartoon-esque characters and colourful locations. The sound isn't bad, either, with predictably Egyptian music and generally decent voice acting. Unfortunately, the script is less hilarious than it sets out to be: it might raise a wry smile at points, but you're unlikely to laugh out loud. In fact, it's the script that ultimately lets this game down. After a few hours, we didn't really care whether or not Assil reclaimed his love life or the Ankh, and we don't imagine you will, either.

Tom Royal

SUMMARY

- ✓ Reasonably challenging puzzles
- ✓ Pleasant, cartoony graphics
- ✗ Not as funny as it sets out to be

ADVENTURE GAME Requires Windows 2000/XP/Vista, 1.65GHz processor, 256MB RAM, DirectX 9.0C

PRODUCT CODE 1423598

SUPPLIER www.powerplaydirect.com

DETAILS www.xider-games.com



▲ In PKR you can tease or cheer other players, just as you would in a real game of poker

PKR LIMITED PKR

★★★★★

Free

Online poker is nothing new, but it's the social aspect that many incarnations miss. PKR aims to set this straight by giving you and your opponents an avatar, so you feel more like you're sitting in a poker game and less like you're sat alone in front of your PC.

It's mostly successful, too, with a wide range of options to let you customise the way your player looks. Once you're happy, you just join a game and pick a seat. Once in the game, a range of emotes lets you cheer, jeer, condescend or compliment other players, just as you would during a real game.

The in-game screen is intuitive, and there's room for customisation of the camera view, your playing preferences (such as whether or not to show your cards) and your mood, all of which add to the enjoyment. There's also the option to play the game in a small window on your desktop, although if you don't pay attention the obvious does happen, and you'll fold on good hands or just lose everything.

There's a good community feel to PKR, and the tables are often bustling with helpful and enjoyable company, happy to tell you that you have a nice hand if and when you deserve it. There's also a wide variety of locations, styles of game and tournaments to enter. Refreshingly, there's little pressure on you to play for real money, with a thriving casual crowd who just play for fun.

The only problem with the free games is that people tend to go all in, or take other hand-ruining steps that they'd never consider, and then simply bring up the menu and request some more free chips to carry on playing.

All told, PKR is a good evolution of online poker. It may require some patience and a little time to get used to, but it's entertaining, engrossing and as social as you can get without playing offline. With no push to take your money, you can enjoy online poker without actually gambling.

Kevin Pocock

SUMMARY

- ✓ You don't have to play for real money
- ✓ Avatars make it feel realistic
- ✗ Infinite free money can ruin a game

POKER SIMULATION Requires Windows 2000/XP, 1GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 450MB disk space, DirectX 9.0c compatible card, internet connection, IE6 or equivalent
SUPPLIER www.pkr.com
DETAILS www.pkr.com